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STATE FOR NEA/ELA  
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TAGS: PREL EG LE SY XF  
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN MFA ON ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT, SYRIA-LEBANON

Classified By: ECPO Minister Counselor William R. Stewart  
for reasons 1.4 (b).

¶1. (C) Summary: In the wake of a disappointing Arab League summit, Hossam Zaki said that Egypt is urging Syria to behave more responsibly in solving intra-Arab problems. He reported that Syrian president al-Assad told the summit that Syria will not address the "Lebanon problem" until a "legitimate president" is elected. End summary.

¶2. (C) MFA Spokesman and Senior Advisor Hossam Zaki told Minister Counselor April 3 that the Arab League summit in Damascus had been disappointing -- "We had hoped for something more decisive" -- but not disastrous because expectations going in were low, and the Syrians, by and large, behaved themselves. There were no breakthroughs, he noted, but neither were there any breakdowns.

¶3. (C) MinCouns asked if the Syrians had offered to change any aspects of their behavior. We believe the Syrians have two courses available to them, Zaki opined: either to behave "low-key" as they did during the summit and work to rebuild the bridges they have torn down within the Arab world, "or to become more difficult than ever." Syria, as the "President of the Summit," should feel some sense of responsibility to reach out to those it has alienated, Zaki opined. "We are urging them to take the high road," but it is not clear which choice they will make.

¶4. (C) Zaki said that in closed session, Syrian president al-Assad said that Syria would not deal with Lebanon until they elected a "legitimate president" and formed a "legitimate government." This is precisely the opposite of Siniora's position, Zaki said. "He believes that normalizing relations with Syria will greatly help in holding legitimate presidential elections, and should therefore come first." There is little room for compromise in the two positions, Zaki observed.

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